No. 81

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"No, I don't need your money just yet," he declared. "I'll do a little gold digging of my own. And I am happy that you are willing to meet me occasionally."

R. of M. G., No. 81.

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PHILIP GORDON volunteered to testify in the case of Olive Carrel. In fact he insisted upon it against the advise of Mr. Shields. "Your Honor," he said, bowing to the judge, "I have the pleasure of knowing Miss Carrel personally. And before I go any further, I wish to state that the lady is a relative of mine. I married her sister. Her name is Carey, and not Carrel. She was formerly an actress.

"The fact that she changed her name was due to a noble impulse. That she voluntarily undertook to follow the footsteps of Him who said: 'Clothe the nacked, feed the hungry, and nurse the sick,' was also the fruit of a noble, self-sacrificing impulse.

"There is not a man in this room who would dare to utter one word to the discredit of that charity nurse. He who does, will have to answer to me personally."

As he uttered these words, Phil's flaming eyes were fixed on those of the prohibition agent. "I repeat, the man who dares speak evil of her, must answer to me."

The man to whom this was addressed moved uneasily. His mind was quickly made up what to do. Phil Gordon was too big a man to tackle.

"With regard to the testimony of this fellow over there," indicating Sam Perkins, "I wish to say that it was false from the beginning to end. I did accuse him of stealing, and he has been arrested. He ought to be sent to prison for perjury.

"But that is not all!" he cried in stentorian tones. "I took the trouble to look into this thing. I paid a visit to his home and talked with his sick wife. She tells me that she saw Perkins place the bottle of moon into the nurse's bag.

"Unfortunately Mrs. Perkins is bedfast and can not come here to testify. But I have here—" he reached into his pocket— "a note written by her. It is signed.

If it pleases Your Honor, I wish to submit it."

The judge reached eagerly for the note. As he read it, his face hardened.

"What have you to say for yourself, Perkins?" he demanded sternly.

"My wife never wrote that note!" the fellow cried, losing his head entirely. "It is false—a damned lie. I never——"

But that was as far as he got.

At a motion from the judge, two big officers seized him, and he was taken away swearing and protesting his innocence. Two charges were filed against him immediately.

One was that of being a bootlegger, and the other, perjury.

"Miss Carrel, or Miss Carey," said the judge after the noise in the court room had subsided, "I regret that you were made the victim of a most foul plot.

"You may rest assured that this man Perkins will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. You are dismissed, and I personally wish to offer you my profound apologies."

Julia blushed prettily and inclined her head.

The prohibition agent was obviously disappointed. And it seemed for a moment that he was about to enter a protest because he had been excluded from testifying.

But as he stood, watching Philip Gordon and the charity nurse indulging in an intimate conversation with the judge, he came to the conclusion that absolute silence was the thing to observe.

He slunk away like the coward he was.

Mr. Shields, more than satisfied with the termination of this case, shook hands with the judge, Philip Gordon and Julia.

"You'll excuse me now, won't you?" he said to the

latter.

"Not until you have told me what I owe you," she answered, taking a hold of his hand.

"Why, I didn't do anything worth talking about," the old lawyer retorted. "Moreover, you don't think I would take money from the daughter of the best and dearest friend I ever had. You know, I promised your father on his death bed that I would look after his two girls."

Julia smiled broadly.

"You are surely doing it, Mr. Shields," she said. "You are guarding the interests of both of us, and I am deeply grateful. My sister is, too."

The words had scarcely left her lips when she caught Gordon's eyes staring at her. The expression on his face was one of perplexity and pain. And there was an element of surprise in it.

Unwittingly Julia allowed something to slip which should have been kept secret at least for the time being.

After the attorney had taken his departure, Gordon drew her arm through his, and together they walked out into the corridor.

She could tell by his demeanor that his mind was troubled. But he did not speak until they were seated in his closed car.

He turned to her suddenly and spoke in a husky tone.

"I am going to ask you to explain something to me, Julia," he began. "I need not tell you how miserably unhappy I have been since I lost my — my first wife. God only knows how dearly I loved her, and how I regretted the circumstances which brought about our separation.

"When you expressed your gratitude to Mr. Shields, you included your sister. How could you do that

when she is generally believed to be dead?"

Julia shook her head.

"Let us not talk about that now, Phil," she replied, snuggling a little closer to him. "First of all I want to tell you how grateful I am to you. Your defense of me was the noblest thing any man ever did for a woman. I wish I could reward you as you deserve."

"You can reward me if you tell me the absolute truth," said Phil somewhat impatiently. "Somehow I have a feeling that you and Mr. Shields are hiding something from me. What is it? Is it something which concerns Marie?"

Julia had neither the courage nor the desire to keep certain facts from her brother-in-law any longer.

So far as she could see there was not a single good reason why he should not know the truth. Surely he had been punished sufficiently for his unreasonable jealousy and foolish pride.

Within a few days the courts would set the machinery in motion which was to free him from his hateful matrimonial alliance with the woman who became his second wife.

"Phil," she said, meeting his anxious eyes squarely, "how long has Miss Desmond been in your employ as governess?"

The question startled him, but as quietly as he could, he answered; stating the exact length of time and a few more things very complimentary to the governess of his children.

"Did you ever stop to think," Julia went on, "why this Miss Desmond should sacrifice herself for your children the way she has done?"

"No, I didn't," he declared, then stopped suddenly.

"Did it ever occur to you that this Miss Desmond might be the mother of your children—your first wife,

Marie?"

The sentence had hardly left the speoker's lips, when Gordon made a gasping sound.

For a moment he covered his face with his hands, utterly overwhelmed. The truth came to him in a flash.

"Merciful God!" he cried, taking Julia by the shoulder and shaking her. "Don't keep me in suspense. Is she—is Miss Desmond my Marie?"

"She certainly is," came back quietly and with a smile.

The next thing Gordon did was to get a hold of the speaking tube which connected with the chauffeur.

"Drive home as fast as you can!" he shouted so loud that the man nearly lost his hold on the wheel. "Never mind traffic regulations. Hurry, please, hurry!"

Chapter 268

ATTEMPTED MURDER

THE BODY of Charles Ames had been borne to its last resting place in their private mausoleum in the beautiful Woodlawn cemetery. The Ames mansion was closed to all callers. Mrs. Ames, the bereaved wife, refused to leave her own apartment.

While her son, Robert, was making preparations in feverish haste to return to Westchester and Hazel. He thought constantly of her, and these thoughts lingered with him like a sweet perfume.

Alice had been given her own suite of rooms in the palatial Ames residence, and at this moment she sat in her luxurious boudoir waiting for the footsteps that would not come.

The dream of her life had been realized.

She was the wife of handsome Robert Ames, the young multi-millionaire — the man for whose favor the society matrons in the exclusive set had been ready to tear out each others hair and do sundry rude things.

If ever a woman loved a man, Alice loved young Robert Ames. She loved him with all the strength of her passionate nature.

Alice sat at the window, watching the long procession of automobiles and costly limousines parading up and down the fashionable thoroughfare.

Her tear-stained, hot face, was pressed against the cold glass, while a quick succession of sobs shook her slender frame.

"Oh God, I cannot stand this," she moaned. "Am

I never to know a happy hour in this miserable life?"

She looked entrancingly beautiful as she stood there, attired in a close fitting black gown, but the proud pose of her dark head was missing.

It was bowed in shame and humiliation.

Her pride had been wounded unto death. Alice had been cast off—spurned on her wedding day, by the man for whose love she was ready to sell her immortal soul.

In the spacious library below sat the man who was the cause of all her anguish and bitter humiliation.

If Alice was suffering, he was suffering also; though his mental torture was perhaps less poignant than that of his unhappy wife.

Robert Ames was experiencing pangs of self-reproach and remorse caused by his present inenviable predicament, into which his own impetuous nature and folly had plunged him.

He was vainly raking his clouded brains to find some way to extricate himself, but so far he had met with but little success.

This had all come so sudden, so unexpected, he could scarcely realize the truth of it.

His mind was made up to one thing, however. He expected to take the morning train for the little village by the sea, and make a clean breast of it all to his Hazel.

Whatever the outcome of these entanglements would be, he meant to remarry Hazel and make her the mistress of the Ames mansion.

His strong young heart was filled with loyalty and love for her. It beat faster as he thought of her.

Her trusting eyes as they had last looked at him with the pitiful plea: "Come back to me, Robert. You are my life, my all," were ever before him.

It came to him now, it almost overwhelmed him;

this love for the angelic young girl, who had trusted him implicitly.

How empty, how utterly devoid of happiness and joy his life would be without her.

Robert Ames realized that at this moment, and he longed for her most when an almost insurmountable barrier had arisen to separate him from her.

He had sat there for almost two hours before the large mahogany desk which had hidden all the business and private secrets of his father.

It was his own now, and everything it contained.

As he searched through a number of papers and documents which he had found in a little drawer, marked "Private," he came across an envelope which bore the following legend:

"To my son Robert. To be opened one year after his marriage to Alice Procter."

Robert Ames was rather puzzled as he fingered the large, securely sealed envelope.

He wondered if the message contained in this envelope could have any bearing upon the fateful words which his father had whispered into his ears just before he breathed his last.

It was almost midnight now, and still Robert sat at the desk lost in thought. All the servants had retired long ago.

There was no sleep for him until he had obtained the pardon of his beloved Hazel, and righted the terrible wrong he had done her.

His back was turned to the window and he did not notice the repeated flashes of lightning which illuminated the night.

He arose when a sudden crash of thunder shook the entire building, and walked over to the window.

He looked out across the lawn and a sudden trem-

bling coursed through his tall frame.

"God, the heat is frightful," he said half aloud.

Then he threw open the window and drew aside the heavy curtains.

Flash after flash of lightning came now in rapid succession, and each of them were followed by angry peals of thunder.

It was a fascinating drama of the elements, and Robert Ames watched it for some time.

At last he grew weary, and with a heavy sigh he turned his back to the window and resumed his seat at the desk.

Had he remained a few moments longer in his former position, he would have seen a dark figure crossing the lawn and crouch under the window.

A piercing pair of black eyes had been watching the library window for some time, and a cruel smile played about the tightly closed lips of a pale face.

Robert Ames was unaware that the dark figure was stealthily approaching the window, nor did he dream that at this moment his life was in fearful danger.

A dark, hooded head appeared suddenly above the window ledge, and an instant later a tall figure, carefully hidden in a long, black cloak, came into full view.

It was a terrible apparition. It looked like a veritable shadow of death.

Very little of the face was visible, but from a small opening in the hood peered the black eyes furtively — ominously.

Suddenly Robert Ames turned his head. His eyes became fastened upon the window. The expression of curiosity changed quickly to one of horror.

A sudden gust of wind had blown aside the curtain and revealed the dark figure crouching against the wall.

With a half smothered cry he rose to his feet. He stared like a man possessed. What was it — man or woman?

Still Robert stared. The black eyes seemed to hold him by some mesmeric power and not a sound escaped his lips.

Then suddenly he regained the mastery over his sluggish mental faculties. He made a step forward and assumed a threatening attitude.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked in a stern voice.

For an answer the figure in black made a swift motion and a slim white hand came into full view, clutching a revolver.

Then came a frightful flash of lightning, which nearly blinded Robert Ames, but another flash occurred close to his face, simultaneously.

He sretched out both hands as if he wanted to ward off a blow.

He staggered forward and tried to reach the retreating figure, but a stinging pain in his left side rendered him almost helpless. He felt a sort of paralysis come over him.

Everything grew misty before his eyes, then blood red, and with a groan he fell insensible to the floor.

The mysterious dark figure glided forward like a cat and bent over the prostrate man and nodded its head in approbation.

Robert Ames was lying on his back with his right hand stretched out.

A moment later the revolver had been put into that hand and the fingers closed upon it as if in a paroxism of pain.

Then the figure darted over to the open desk and searched among the papers.

With a ghastly smile of satisfaction it took several documents, among which was the letter of Frederick Ames to his son Robert, and hid them under the long black cloak.

An instant later the figure disappeared as noiselessly as it had come.

The storm was at its height now and the almost constant flashes of lightning lit up the entire city with a lurid light. The heavens opened and the rain came down in torrents.

The man lying on the floor, whose life-blood stained the costly carpet crimson, groaned once or twice.

His lips moved slightly and formed the one word—Hazel.

His strength and young vigorous manhood struggled valiantly to shake off the black unconsciousness, which held him in a deadly grip, but his mortal wound would not permit it.

There was a slight quivering in his body, then it lay perfectly still.

The intense silence that followed was broken suddenly by the swish of the window curtains, as they were apart.

A pair of dark eyes cast a swift glance into the room. The low mocking laugh which escaped the lips of the fiend who had returned to make sure of its work, went unheard. The man on the floor was to all appearances quite dead.

The frightful storm had also awakened Alice from her troubled slumbers. For hours she laid fully dressed

upon her bed, staring at the ceiling with hot, tearless eyes.

When she at last succumbed to a spell of utter weariness, a frightful crash of thunder sent her panting to her feet.

Her first thought was that the house had been struck by lightning, for the windows rattled, and the entire building rocked upon its foundation.

She walked timidly to the window and looked out.

Directly below her own window was that of the library, and she saw at a glance by the reflection upon the green lawn that there was still a brilliant light in the room.

Alice knew instinctively that her husband was in there. Her whole heart went out to him that moment, and she longed to be near him.

Was she not his lawful wife who had a perfect right to be near her own husband?

Then suddenly she felt a choking sensation—an indefinable something, as if her heart was being crushed slowly.

She staggered for a moment, but it passed off as quickly as it came.

"What can this mean?" she gasped. "Oh, Robert, my dear husband, I must see him."

She looked at herself in the mirror and watched the color coming back into her face.

Then she quickly disrobed and put on a comfortable pink dressing gown.

Alice had never looked more entrancingly beautiful in her life than she did at this moment, and with a smile of satisfaction playing about her red, sensual lips she prepared to leave the room.

For a moment she hesitated.

How would Robert receive her? Would he be kind and tolerate her in his presence, or would he order her sternly away?

There was a terrible conflict in Alice's heart for some minutes between love and pride, but love and desire gained the victory.

With a decisive motion she opened the door and passed out into the corridor. It was dimly lighted and she reached the broad staircase in a few steps.

Her feet glided noiselessly over the rich velvet carpet, and a moment later she stood in the large reception hall below.

She approached the library door timidly with the hot blood surging to her face. Alice knocked gently and waited. There was no response.

She knocked again, and this time a trifle louder. Again no answer.

Her heart was beating like a triphammer as she tried the door. She turned the knob and it opened.

A cluster of electric lights flooded the room with a brilliant light, it almost hurt the eyes. Alice saw everything at a glance.

The library was apparently deserted. Her husband was not there.

She advanced a few steps into the room and came to a sudden stop with a startled cry.

What was that dark object, which lay so quiet and still, in the shadow of the massive mahogany table?

She stooped and touched the white face with her hand—then recoiled with a heartrending scream.

"Robert! Oh God, Robert, my darling, what has happened?"

She flung herself over the prostrate form and kissed the still warm lips again and again.

"Robert, Robert, speak to me!" she moaned.

But there was no response to her pitious appeal. Then Alice ran out into the hall, screaming loudly for help.

The first person arriving upon the scene was Arthur Vernon.

It was rather strange that he came fully dressed. He was followed closely by Robert's mother and a number of badly frightened servants.

Mrs. Ames was at the side of her wounded boy in an instant.

In spite of the great pain in her mother's heart, she seemed to appear cool and collected. She gave her directions in a slightly quivering voice.

"Send for Dr. Fielding at once," she said to one of the servants. Then turning to Arthur Vernon: "He seems to be badly hurt, but his heart is still beating vigorously. Help me lay him upon the couch."

Suddenly their eyes fell upon the revolver, still tightly clutched in Robert's hand.

The mother stared at the ghastly object with her face going deadly white. She was losing her magnificent self-control.

"Oh, Robert, my boy," she sobbed, "this cannot be true. You did not mean to take your own life."

"I am very much afraid that all appearances point that way, Mrs. Ames," was the heartless comment of Arthur Vernon.

Alice had seen the revolver, too. She staggered back against the table and looked upon the scene with wild, dilating eyes.

Was it possible that her husband had meant to take his own life?

If so, what was the motive for it? What could have driven him to take so desperate a step?

"Oh God, I am sure he could not hate me so much

that our marriage, even under such unusual circumstances, could so far embitter his life," she moaned.

Mrs. Ames had opened her boy's coat and shirt and made an effort to stop the steady flow of blood.

She breathed a sigh of intense relief when Dr. Fielding, their old family physician, entered the room.

Dr. Fielding made a quick examination of the wound and ordered the young man removed to a more comfortable bed.

They carried him to his own room and the probing for the bullet began.

It took some time, but it was found at last.

The bullet had plowed its way through the chest and had grazed he lower part of the left lung, embedding itself under the left shoulder blade.

"The wound is a serious one, but not necessarily fatal," was the verdict of Dr. Fielding. He advised to send for a trained nurse, to which Alice objected strenuously.

"My place is at his side, and I will not yield even to a trained nurse," she said with decision.

Dr. Fielding shook his gray head with a smile and offered no further objections.

Chapter 269

CONVALESCING

MRS. AMES yielded the place at her boy's bedside graciously to his beautiful young wife, Alice. She was the last one to leave, however, and Alice promised to call her at once if Robert should grow any worse.

The recovery of Robert Ames was exceedingly slow. He did not recover consciousness until almost twenty-four hours after the shooting, and when at last he did open his eyes, his mind was wandering.

A high fever set in and it took the combined efforts of two skilled physicians to check it.

Robert spoke constantly of his Hazel in his wild, feverish dreams.

He was utterly unconscious of the fact that every time he mentioned her name, he plunged a two-edged dagger into the heart of the woman who sat at his bedside.

"Hazel — Hazel, my darling, come to me!" he called out feebly.

There was no response save the heart-breaking sobs of Alice, who was suffering all the tortures of hades as she sat there, yearning for a sign of recognition from her beloved husband.

When Robert Ames did open his lips, it was to cry out for that other woman. Alice wept scalding tears.

There was not a soul to comfort her. The cause of her grief was something which she could not confide to any other living person.

The crown of thorns was added to her mental

agonies when Robert at last regained full control of his senses.

He opened his eyes and looked about wonderingly for some minutes.

Alice looked lovingly into her husband's eyes. She could scarcely keep back the happy tears.

"Robert, Robert," she whispered, "don't you even know me?"

He stared at her with a cold expression in his eyes. Then he turned his face to the wall. What the inarticulate words were he muttered to himself, she could not understand.

Perhaps it was better so; for her heart was already near the breaking point.

The wounded man was fully conscious. His brain began to clear itself for action, and slowly—by degrees, all that had happened came back to him.

"Go and send Mr. Vernon to me," he said, without turning his head. "I must see him at once."

Alice rose and left the room quickly. She was losing what little self-control she had left, swiftly.

She sought Arthur Vernon and delivered her husband's message, then flew to her own room and bolted the door.

Robert Ames was impatiently staring at the door when Arthur Vernon entered.

The secretary of his late father came forward with a jovial smile on his face and held out his hand.

"I am glad to see you doing so well, Robert," he cried.

The expression of his face belied his words, however. There was something cold and calculating in those steel gray eyes, which Robert Ames did not see.

"Have I been sick very long?" the young man asked feebly.

"Yes, for several weeks, Robert," the other replied.

Robert turned his head and looked out of the window. The snow was falling steadily.

"Yes—yes, I remember now," he said eagerly. "It was on that hot night in September, and now it is coming winter."

Then suddenly he made an attempt to raise himself to a sitting posture.

"Great God, Vernon! What about Hazel — my wife? I must go to her at once."

"Pray don't alarm yourself about Hazel, my dear Robert," Arthur Vernon said reassuringly. "I took that matter upon myself during your illness and saw to it that she was well taken care of."

Robert Ames held out his hand.

"I thank you for that with all my heart, old man," he said fervently. "What excuse did you make for my prolonged absence, Arthur?"

"I told her that your firm had sent you on a long trip through the western States, and that you would probably be gone for some months." Vernon lied glibly.

"Ah, I shall never forget this, Arthur, my old friend." Robert Ames replied. "Now tell me everything, how is Hazel?"

"Hazel is well and more beautiful than ever." Vernon announced. "She seems to be perfectly satisfied with the explanation I gave her concerning you."

Robert remained silent and thoughtful for some moments.

A pleasant smile of satisfaction was playing about his lips, but the expression of his face suddenly changed to one of extreme perplexity.

"But how about money, Arthur?" he asked. "I remember I did not leave a great sum when I left her.

She must be in want."

"I have supplied her with sufficient funds to keep her comfortably until you will be able to see her," Arthur Vernon replied promptly. "I gave her the amount of one thousand dollars from my own savings account, knowing that you would reimburse me."

Again Arthur Vernon lied.

"To be sure, I shall do so at once," Robert declared. "I will give you a check covering the amount immediately. You will find my check-book on the desk in the library; will you get it for me, please?"

Arthur Vernon obeyed this request with unusual alacrity, and a moment later he returned with the check-book of his young master.

Robert sat up and wrote the check with a trembling hand and handed it to the other, who took it without comment.

As he glanced casually over the figures, he discovered that the check was made out for the sum of two thousand dollars.

"Did you not make a mistake, Robert?" he asked.

"No, that is not a mistake," the young man replied. "I merely wish to show my appreciation of your faithfulness."

Vernon smiled, then said:

"You are generous, indeed, Robert. I thank you."

"Now my only hope is that I shall soon be able to leave this room and take a run down to Westchester," Robert Ames remarked, ignoring the expression of thanks.

"May I ask just one question, Robert?" the other said after an awkward pause. "And will you promise not to be offended?"

"Why, certainly not, old man. You simply could

not offend me to-day by asking a dozen questions. Fire away."

"Will you tell me what drove you to make that attempt upon your own life?" Vernon asked.

"What do you mean, Arthur?"

Robert Ames was staring at the speaker with wide open eyes.

"I mean," the other replied, "that we found you lying on the floor of the library with a revolver tightly clutched in your right hand. One chamber of the gun was empty and the bullet Dr. Felding extracted from your chest was of the same caliber as that of the gun you held."

Robert Ames swept the back of his hand across his eyes as if he wanted to brush away something which obstructed his vision.

Then a sudden flash of intelligence came into them.

"Yes—yes, I remember everything now," he began "It happened during that awful storm. I threw the window open and a moment later I saw a tall, dark figure.

"It looked like the spectre of death. The revolver was leveled at my breast. Then came that terrible flash of lightning—a burning pain in my breast, and I knew no more."

Arthur Vernon listened breathlessly to the words of his young master.

He had been positive that Robert Ames had attempted suicide, but this put a new face on the matter.

There was absolutely no doubt in his mind at this moment but what this had been a plain case of attempted murder.

"I suggest that we put the matter in the hands of a competent detective, Robert," he said. "It is a trifle

over four months since it occurred, but there is still a chance that the miscreant may be brought to justice."

The young man shook his head slowly.

"It would mean a lot of newspaper talk and notoriety. I propose to let the matter drop. I shall know how to protect myself in the future."

Arthur Vernon rose.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Robert? Shall I send Alice to you?"

"No," came the emphatic reply. "Keep her away from me, if you can. I wish I could like her better than I do, but it is simply impossible." He sighed wearily.

"Please draw the blinds before you go. I feel rather tired and sleepy."

Vernon did as he was tod and then tip-toed out of the room.

When he opened the door he came face to face with Alice.

She was about to enter the sickroom, and the expression of her face led him to believe that she had been eavesdropping.

It was white and tense. Her dilating eyes burned questioningly into his own.

"Follow me to my boudoir," she hissed into his ear, "I must speak to you."

This sudden and rather unexpected invitation came as a pleasant surprise to the private secretary of Robert Ames.

He was willing and anxious to serve this beautiful woman.

Another week had passed and Robert Ames was still confined to his room. He was convalescing, how-

ever, and the crisis had passed. Every word or gesture showed the growing impatience of the impetuous youth.

He would have left the room long before this, had not Dr. Fielding insisted that his orders must be obeyed.

To deviate in the slightest degree meant new danger to his still feeble health—perhaps death.

The young millionaire had ample time for reflection. Hour after hour he sat there staring at the blue sky, while his thoughts were all of Hazel.

He wondered often as to whether after all it had been a wise thing to yield to the swift, sudden impulses of youth.

He had caused this innocent young girl much suffering, and the thought came to him like a sharp pain that he had considered no one but himself.

Robert Ames had been deeming himself a romantic hero, who married a poor girl in spite of all the many obstacles that his station and wealth threw in his pathway.

Sometimes he began to doubt whether true heroism would not have consisted in refusing to yield to the desire, and in consulting some older and wiser head about the matter.

Still, doubt did not in the least affect his great love for his young and beautiful wife.

Nothing could touch that love — neither ruin, shame, nor the tempting loveliness of Alice.

In two days Robert had hoped to be able to make the trip to Westchester.

He wanted to celebrate their reunion on this day; but in this he was to be disappointed.

Since he could not go himself he planned to send his secretary and confidential friend, Arthur Vernon, to convey his heart-felt wishes and carry to her all the magnificent gifts he had ordered him to buy for her.

It was almost three o'clock, the appointed hour, when the secretary was to come to him for some final instructions.

Vernon was a punctual man, and promptly at the stroke of three he entered the room and was greeted by his young master with a pleasant smile.

"You have not spoken of your trip to Westchester to-morrow, to my mother nor Alice, have you, Arthur?" Robert Ames began, after motioning Vernon to a seat nearby.

"No, sir. Not a word," was the prompt answer.

"That is well. It is not necessary that they should trouble their heads about my affairs, though I suspect that Alice knows everything. How she gained her information is a mystery to me."

Arthur Vernon colored up guiltily.

He was at this moment intently studying the pattern of the carpet, and did not raise his eyes to those of his master.

"I will have to trust everything to your good judgment," the young man continued, "and I hope you will see to it that Hazel is well provided for. This envelope contains some letters and another little gift for Hazel. Be careful and don't lose it."

The secretary took the rather bulky envelope and put it in his breast-pocket.

"You may rely upon me absolutely, Robert," he replied with a confidential smile. After receiving some whispered instructions he rose to depart.

"Tell Hazel that I shall be able to see her in two weeks," were the last words of Robert Ames.

Arthur Vernon closed the door softly behind him and remained standing in the corridor for some minutes.

A great change came over him, and gradually the

mask slipped from his face.

A treacherous smile played about his thin, cruel lips. He rubbed his hands as if he was immensely pleased about something.

Then he walked straight to the door which led to Alice's boudoir. His gentle knock was answered instantly.

The door was opened by Alice herself. She was evidently expecting him.

After glancing swiftly up and down the corridor, to make sure that no one had seen him, he entered her private apartment. She closed the door carefully and locked it.

The dark rings under her eyes told of sleepless nights, and her pale face was still wet from her recent tears.

With an imperious sweep of her hand she motioned him to a seat, then sat down herself directly opposite him.

"You come from him?" she began, without further ceremony.

"Yes, Mrs. Ames," was his answer.

"And you are going in his place to Westchester and that woman?" she questioned him.

"That is his wish."

Alice looked straight into the eyes of the man. There was something in her own which made him tremble and afraid.

It was a look full of intense hatred and malice.

"I can trust you in this matter absolutely, can I not?" she said, dropping her voice to a whisper.

"Absolutely, Mrs. Ames," Arthur Vernon said readily.

"What was the price you named?"

"Five thousand," he answered promptly.

"And you will be able to buy her off, if I agree to pay you that sum, or dispose of her in some other way?" she asked.

"I shall not fail in my task, madam," he assured her.

"Very well, then. I will give you a check for the entire amount and you can cash it at my bank. You are known to the cashier."

Alice rose and walked over to the desk, wrote out the check, and handed it to Vernon.

"Are you going by train?" she asked.

"No, I am to take Mr. Ames' green touring car and take a number of presents," he replied.

The lips of the woman curled. An expression of contempt crept into her face. Then she said:

"You have no fear of Mr. Ames in this matter, Mr Vernon?"

"None in the least," the secretary replied. "I shall be able to oblige you as well as render my master a service. He is still nothing but a boy, and he will thank me afterwards for having freed him from a woman who is bound to be a millstone around his neck."

Alice rose and took a few turns up and down the room, apparently lost in thought. Her eyes were on the floor and she did not notice that the man rose also and made preparations to leave.

He had taken his hat and coat, and was almost at the door when she stopped him.

"One more word, Mr. Vernon," she said rather excitedly.

"I am listening, Mrs. Ames."

"You will not use violence, and you must promise me positively that there will be no blood shed."

Her eyes were again fastened upon his with a half pleading, half compelling look.

"There are other means which will be just as expedient and far less likely to create comment and suspicion," Vernon replied with a smile.

She gave him her hand, which he brought to his lips and kissed fervently. Alice snatched it away as if it had been stung by an adder, while a flush of indignation mantled her cheeks. She opened the door silently without again looking at the man.

After he had gone she remained standing in the door for several minutes with an ominous cloud on her brow.

Chapter 270

'AT LAST!

RANDOLPH WARREN SHIELDS, which was his full name, had always had the reputation of being a man with many eccentricities. "R. W.", as his friends called him for short, was that, and more. Some of the things he did caused his colleages in the law profession to raise their eyebrows questioningly and snicker.

But the snicker was usually changed to a smile of admiration later on. He had an almost uncanny knowledge of human nature.

When a man came to his office for legal advice, that man had to state his case plainly and quickly. If he made the mistake of contradicting himself, he found himself unceremoniously turned down.

The old quip that most lawyers are crooks and money-grabbers, could not be applied to R. W. Shields.

All of his clients must have just cause for complaint, or he refused to bother with them. He absolutely refused to defend known criminals and political gangsters.

His honesty of purpose had always been unquestionable. He was a loyal friend and a generous enemy.

He never broke his word to any man or woman. When he promised Marvin Carey on the latter's death bed that he would look after his two daughters, Julia and Marie, he meant to keep that promise.

Marie Carey had always been his favorite.

Marie, in turn, had a daughter's affection for him. Therefore it was quite natural that she should go to him

for advice when trouble came.

But the case involving Philip Gordon and his lovely wife, was a difficult one. There were some angles he could not straighten out.

While he did not blame Gordon entirely for the unfortunate separation, he gave him no credit for making Alice Procter his second wife shortly afterward.

From that day on, Mr. Shields doubled his efforts to be of service to Marie.

When the letter came from Australia that she was the sole heir of a fortune left by an uncle, he made the trip to Sidney without saying a word to Marie about it. And he paid his own expenses.

He wanted to make sure that there was no hoax about it before speaking about the inheritance to her.

From the very outset of Phillip Gordon's marriage to Alice Procter, he predicted that it would not last. No couple ever was more mismated.

And he would have gone to Gordon and told him that his first wife was still among the living if Marie had not sternly forbidden it.

But as one development followed another, it was proven that Marie did the right thing.

Nevertheless Mr. Shields was determined to bring Marie and Phil together again as soon as conditions warranted it.

That state of affairs had come at last. When Gordon came to him with the request that the necessary legal steps be taken to free him from Alice, Mr. Shields took the case gladly.

Notice of it was published in the various Chicago newspapers, but no response came.

Alice evidently did not wish to contest the suit, and for a very good reason.

She did not want it to be broadcast throughout

the world that in the eyes of the law she had never been Philip Gordon's wife. Then there was that constant fear of being arrested for sending that poisoned candy to Marie.

One week after the required newspaper announcement, the old lawyer quietly went to the Court of Domestic Relations.

The judge, a life-long friend of his, accepted his statements without demanding the usual sworn affidavit. Right then and there Philip Gordon's marriage to Alice Procter was annulled.

Of course, Mr. Shields did not say anything to Phil about it. This did not fit in with his plan.

He wanted the pleasure of tearing the veil from Gordon's eyes and announce that Miss Desmond, the governess, was none other than Marie, his first and only wife.

The unhappy affair in which Julia became involved, served to retard this final step. She had to be cleared of the charges against her before the sensational truth became known to Phil.

What occurred at the trial has already been recorded. As soon as it was over, the old lawyer jumped into his machine and drove out to Oak Manor as fast as he could.

He had left Gordon and Julia under the impression that he had some business in one of the other courts.

Upon his arrival at Oak Manor, he was anxiously received by Marie. She wanted to know all about Julia's trial and the result.

He told her in a few words, then added with a twinkle in his eyes:

"This is the day on which you shall come again into your own, my dear child. I am going to stay until Phil comes back, and then——"

"No—no, you mustn't!" she interrupted him, pale as death. "Not until he is absolutely free. Not until his absolute divorce from Alice has been granted by the court."

Mr. Shields uttered a low laugh and drew a document from his pocket.

"Look at this, he said. "Read it."

Marie's eyes widened as she read the annullment of Phil's marriage to Alice Procter.

"How—how did this all happen?" she wanted to know.

"That was very easy," he grinned, and then told her the details.

Marie was trembling in every limb as he finished.

Somehow she could not bring herself to believe that the happiest hour of her life was so close at hand. It frightened her.

Womanlike, she wondered what Phil would say and do when he found out that she was Marie, his wife, instead of Miss Desmond, the governess of his two little children.

And while she sat there during the momentary silence, her heart beating so frantically, she tried to form some kind of a plan.

She wanted to be alone with Phil and tell him. Not even the children must be present.

But before she came t oany definite conclusion, the sound of an approaching automobile struck her ears. She was on her feet as quickly as Mr. Shields. Both ran to the window and looked out.

"My God—it's Phil!" she gasped.

"And Julia is with him," said the old lawyer. That means something. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find that she already told him."

Continued in next number

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